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Mr R Hinton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hinton

Short inspection of The Brier School

Following my visit to the school with Rowena Green, Ofsted Inspector, on 8 December 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in May 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

Leaders have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils are at the centre of all that you do and the shared aspiration of providing an outstanding education for all pupils has led to further improvements.

Since the last inspection, you have appointed a deputy headteacher and reorganised your leadership team so that all leaders are able to use their skills to drive improvements in their areas of responsibility. To complement this, you have reorganised your staffing and classes so that lessons have a clear focus upon all pupils making rapid progress. Staff take specific action to help individual pupils to learn effectively rather than focusing on the pupils' primary special need.

Action has been taken to provide opportunities for pupils to learn on their own and to take charge of their learning. Leaders actively encourage staff to do this and the vast majority of teachers are willing to take calculated risks and be creative in ways that are right for the pupils.

The teaching in the school is characterised by careful planning that provides challenge for pupils of all abilities. Staff use high-quality resources, which interest the pupils, and skilful questioning to allow pupils to gain a deeper understanding of their learning. Pupils are often given time to think before they respond and staff will use follow-up questions to consolidate or promote further learning.

Teachers and teaching assistants work extremely well together in order to make sure that all pupils make rapid progress. They know the pupils well and enjoy very positive and productive relationships with them. Pupils trust the staff to challenge them, which led to one pupil telling an inspector that, 'it is good to do hard work'. In this climate, pupils thrive.

As a result of outstanding teaching over time, outcomes have improved since the last inspection. Pupils leave the school with a range of appropriate qualifications, including GCSEs. This, along with high quality, impartial careers guidance and time spent attending training at local colleges and providers, allows pupils to continue to do well once they have left the school.

Outcomes in the early years and at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 have also been consistently strong since the last inspection. Almost all pupils currently on roll at the school are on target to meet their aspirational targets in all subjects.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. High expectations of regular attendance and robust systems to follow up any absence mean that attendance is above average. Medical reasons impact on the attendance of some pupils and illness did lead to a slight dip in last year's overall attendance figures. Nevertheless, attendance is improving this year and it has been broadly in line with national averages for all schools since the last inspection.

Conduct around the school is exemplary. Pupils are very polite and considerate. They use the sporting and play equipment in the school grounds in a sensible manner and told inspectors that they feel safe in school.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders are taking effective action to ensure that safeguarding and child protection arrangements keep pupils safe. Up-to-date policies, which make reference to the Secretary of State's most recent guidance, are in place. Staff have received appropriate information about how to keep pupils safe. They have attended relevant safeguarding training and know how to act if they have concerns about a young person's welfare.

Well-organised, written records are stored securely, and referrals made to the designated safeguarding lead are dealt with effectively. School leaders work closely with the local authority to help keep pupils safe. Referrals are made promptly and protocols for children missing education are followed assiduously.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors know the school well. They are informed by the views of pupils, staff and parents and use this, along with their own skills and understanding, to drive further improvements.
- School leaders focus consistently on improving outcomes for all pupils and have created a culture that enables pupils and staff to flourish and excel.

- Staff feel highly valued. They told inspectors that they are supported extremely well, that their training needs are met and that they are inspired to keep trying to improve their practice.
- Teaching is highly effective across the school. Leaders use the arrangements for managing staff performance to set challenging targets and reward sustained high-quality teaching, outcomes and contributions to school improvement.
- Teachers embed mathematics, reading, writing and communication across all subjects, and, as result, all pupils make strong progress in all areas. However, pupils' progress in writing is not as rapid as it is other subjects. School leaders have looked into the reasons for this, and have made swift changes, so that pupils can catch up.
- Pupils make extremely rapid progress in the main body of lessons but this is not always matched at the start of lessons. School leaders are beginning to think of ways to address this.
- In a few lessons, tasks do not always give pupils the opportunity to respond to stimuli in their own way. This restricts their progress.
- Information on pupils' progress is accurate and used consistently to set challenging targets and measure progress. School staff are taking a significant role in shaping the Dudley Agreed P-Level Assessment (DAPA), which is being used by local schools to measure progress.
- The broad and balanced range of subjects inspires pupils to learn and achieve extremely well. They are given a range of opportunities in many subjects to deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of fundamental British values form a significant part of the school's work. Democracy, free speech, fair play, respect for others, the right to one's personal belief and protection of those who are most in need are actively promoted in the school.
- Some pupils attend lessons in neighbouring schools and some spend time in their local mainstream school. If suitable courses are available elsewhere for older pupils, they are supported to access them. Also, when appropriate, staff arrange taster sessions for pupils in their local school. As a result, a few pupils have returned to mainstream education.
- Leaders promote equality of opportunity and diversity exceptionally well. Bullying is extremely rare and pupils are confident that staff will deal with any unkindness, if it occurred.
- Pupils behave extremely well, staff use effective behaviour management techniques if required, but this is rare. Very few exclusions have taken place since the last inspection.
- Parents are extremely supportive of the school and informed inspectors that 'it's a wonderful school', 'all staff are brilliant' and 'the school is well led and managed'. All the parents that spoke with inspectors said that their children were safe and happy and making 'amazing' progress. One parent told us that 'the school is challenging [their child] to become an independent person.'
- Children in the early years enjoy very high-quality teaching, which is responsive to their needs, in a stimulating, safe environment. The broad range of subjects

provides rich, varied and imaginative experiences leading to high rates of progress.

- Governors support and challenge school leaders appropriately. They ensure that effective deployment of staff and resources, including the pupil premium, primary sports funding and special needs funding secures excellent outcomes for pupils. For example, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils usually matches, and often exceeds, that of other pupils in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers give pupils more opportunities to respond to tasks in their own way
- lessons start with activities that allow pupils to make the rapid progress that they make in the main body of lessons
- actions to improve the quality of writing throughout the school are strengthened still further so that pupils make similar progress in writing as they do in mathematics, reading and communication.

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher, other leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. We considered 11 responses to the staff questionnaire and met formally with a group of staff and a group of pupils to gather their views. We made seven short visits to lessons, one with you, where we spoke to pupils, scrutinised their work and looked at displays. An inspector spoke to parents at the start of the day and the views of parents were also considered through five comments made on Parent View and by considering the responses to the school questionnaire. Inspectors evaluated recent information on pupils' progress and scrutinised other records about keeping pupils safe, their behaviour, attendance and punctuality. We also looked at the minutes of meetings of the governing body, staff training records and information about managing teachers' performance.